1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
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PREFACE

THIS volume is the first of a series giving the results of work carried out in the years 1914 and 1915 in the Small Islands off the north-east coast of Malekula in the New Hebrides, one of the chain of Melanesian archipelagos stretching from New Guinea to Fiji and lying roughly parallel to the north-east coast of Australia at a distance of some 1000 miles. I had intended to make a longer stay, but the Great War intervened, and since then a number of circumstances have combined to prevent earlier publication. Choice of the Small Islands as a useful place to carry out field-work was due partly to the fact that a previously planned expedition to New Guinea in company with Dr. Haddon had fallen through, and partly to the influence of the late Dr. W. H. R. Rivers, who had just finished his *History of Melanesian Society* and wished to take the opportunity afforded by the meeting of the British Association in Australia in the summer of 1914, which we both attended, to continue the study of Melanesia, and asked me to go with him. At that time great interest was being aroused by theories of megalithic migration into the Pacific. Codrington had already called attention to the stonework on Gaua in the Banks Islands. Though the culture responsible for the erection of those monuments had long disappeared, new evidence had, however, just come to light of a living megalithic culture through the publication by Dr. (now Professor) Felix Speiser of the results of an expedition to the Northern New Hebrides, where he recorded the existence of numerous megalithic monuments such as dolmens and monoliths still being erected by the natives in the course of their rites.

One of the chief centres of this megalithic culture was the group of small coral islets called the Small Islands already mentioned. It was therefore to these that, with the kind assistance of Mr. (later Sir) Merton King, then Resident Commissioner, Rivers and I eventually made our way. Rivers, however, after staying about a week, left for a Mission station on the island of Tangoa off the south coast of Santo, and I never saw him again in the islands save for a brief meeting on his way home. I stayed behind on one of the Small Islands called Atchin, where my chief field-work was carried out.

It soon became clear that the culture of these islands was far from simple, and that, on account of their situation midway between two main cultural areas, as well as of their favourable climatic position, they were a meeting-place where much culture contact had occurred, and was indeed still taking place. The instability resulting from this contact showed itself most clearly with regard to the two main elements of culture in these islands, namely in the matter of kinship, in which considerable changes were taking place, leading to not infrequent wars

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CHAPTER I

OUTLINE OF CULTURE IN MALEKULA

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

THE islands of the New Hebrides form a long archipelago stretching for about 400 miles from north to south between the 165th and 170th parallels of South Latitude and the 13th and 20th degrees of West Longitude, about midway between the Solomon Islands and Fiji, and flanked on the south-west by the Loyalty Islands and New Caledonia.

The southern islands of this archipelago are few and far between. In the centre is the island of Fate, with Vila, the port of call. Close by, on small islets, are two Polynesian-speaking communities whose ancestors are thought to have drifted over from Polynesia in comparatively recent times, but which have not greatly affected the culture of their neighbours. Some fifty miles northward of Fate the archipelago divides, one branch going due north and the other north-west. The nodal point where these two branches divide is a volcanic area containing two active craters, one on the small island of Lopevi consisting of a single volcano rising sheer from the sea, and the other on the larger island of Ambrim where, in 1913, a whole Mission station was engulfed in an eruption. Westward of this lies the southern portion of Malekula, an island sixty miles long, forming the base of the north-westerly branch of the archipelago. Off its south-eastern coast lie the Maskelyne Islands, and at the western extremity of its southern coastline is South-West Bay, where Deacon did most of his field-work. It is from this southern and south-western region of Malekula that the artificially elongated skulls found in so many museums have been acquired, cranial deformation not being practised in the more northerly regions of the island. It is here also that exists the elaborate mortuary ritual during the course of which these skulls are mounted on wooden effigies and preserved in the men's houses.

Very different from the relative isolation of South Malekula is the situation of the Small Islands that lie off its north-eastern coast. They are in the fortunate position of facing inwards towards the comparatively enclosed inland sea bounded on the south by Ambrim, on the east by Raga[1] which stretches due north of Ambrim, on the north-east by Oba, and on the north-west by Malo and the largest island of the group called Santo. The islands that bound this inland sea, together with Maewo[2]

[1] Also called Pentecost.

[2] Also called Aurora.

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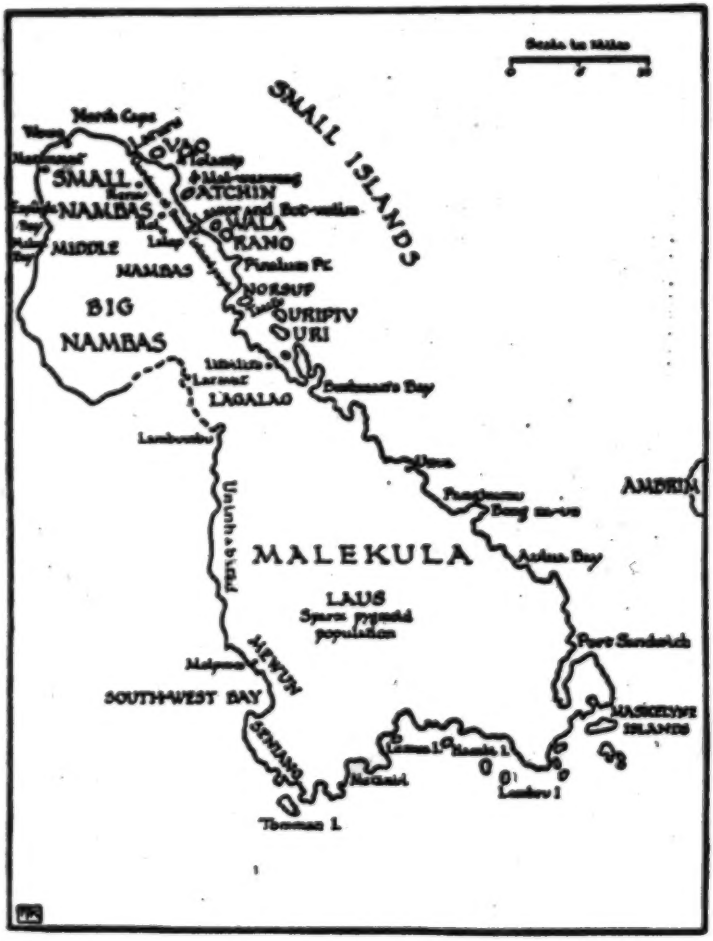

Map 1

Sketch-map of Malekula.

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which lies due north of Raga, constituted for the Small Islanders, before the coming of the white man, the utmost limits of the world. Each had, and still has in their eyes, its special character.

Thus, Ambrim is first and foremost the home of the dead of high rank, who, wandering from the Small Islands down the east coast of Malekula, are transported by a ghostly ferryman to the opposite shore, whence they climb on to the volcano and there carry on life after death. This island (among the natives inhabiting whose shores Deacon discovered the 6-section systems of kinship already mentioned) forms part of the predominately patrilineal area to which Malekula and the Small Islands also belong. In this area, though matrilineal descent is given due weight, the overt organisation is patrilineal with patrilocal residence, that is to say that all men remain within their father's village and marry women from other villages. To this patrilineal area belongs also the southern part of Raga regarding which Père Tattevin has written an important memoir. These islands of Malekula and Ambrim, together with the southern part of Raga, are collectively referred to as the North-Central New Hebrides.

Immediately to the north are the Northern New Hebrides, in all of which overt descent is matrilineal, and in which society is based on what is called a dual organisation consisting of two exogamous matrilineal moieties. This division between an overtly patrilineal area in the south and a matrilineal dual organisation area in the north embraces both branches of the archipelago, the dividing line running due east and west between Malo and Malekula on the one hand and across the middle of Raga on the other. In the minds of the Small Islanders the dual organisation is particularly connected with the islands to the north-east, namely North Raga, Oba and Maewo, all of which are also regarded as the home of the creator-deity known in the Northern New Hebrides as Tagaro and in Vao as Ta-ghar. Particularly is this the case with regard to Oba, to which special pilgrimages are made for the sake of initiation into sex, and which white men have called Lepers Island on account of the light, almost Polynesian coloured skin of its inhabitants.

To the north-west lie Malo and the large island of Santo with its very mixed population, who, though also in the dual organisation area, by no means share the reverential attitude accorded to the inhabitants of the north-eastern islands and are visited chiefly on account of the turmeric which they produce and which is used by the Small Islanders as a basic dye for their few articles of clothing. Students of European colonial expansion will remember that the full name of Santo is Terra Australis del Espiritu Santo, so called by Quiros when in 1606 he, the first white man to sight it, landed to found New Jerusalem on a site now entirely lost.

Northward of the New Hebrides lie the two small archipelagos called the Banks and Torres Islands, which are beyond the ken of the

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Small Islanders. These islands also form part of the dual organisation area, and were the seat of Codrington's main work. Northward of these, with a gap of some 150 miles, are the Santa Cruz Islands, famous for their feather money, some 200 miles to the westward of which lies San Christoval, the most southerly of the large Solomon Islands, whence it would be possible to reach the Asiatic continent without once losing sight of land.

Seasons.

The climate of the New Hebrides is one of the least variable in the world, leading, among other interesting results, to the fact that there is no regular breeding-season for birds, each species having adapted its life-cycle differently to conditions which allow of breeding at almost any time of the year.[1] Being somewhat aside from the main track of cyclones, it is on the whole rather less unhealthy than most parts of Melanesia. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the climate is uniformly moist and rain may fall any day of the year, two main seasons are sufficiently clearly marked off to have an important bearing on the economic and ritual life of the natives. The first coincides with the south-east trade wind that blows from about the middle of May till the end of October, with July as the coolest month, which, under favourable circumstances, somewhat resembles high summer in England. During these months, when there is almost always a cool breeze and sea and sky dazzle in the sunlight, the islands are comparatively free from malaria and the white man is grateful for a blanket at night. These are also for the natives of the Small Islands the months of plenty, during which the main yam crops are dug up and harvested, and during which most of the elaborate ritual activities take place. Towards the end of this season the marine annelid which white men call *palolo* appears during the night at certain phases of the moon. This phenomenon, heralded by the flowering of the erythrina tree in July, is eagerly watched for by the natives at certain stages of the moon's cycle during August and September, and its chief appearance on the twentieth night of the October-November moon is also the time when the dead return to visit the living, and marks the beginning of the New Year.[2]

This also marks the end of the comparatively cool, dry season. Now the prevailing wind veers round to the north-west, bringing with it a sultry equatorial heat. Clouds cover the sky, though still with intervals of brilliant sunshine, till in December squalls become frequent, continuing throughout January and culminating in February in the nearest approach to cyclones which these islands experience. This is also as a rule the hottest month of the year, and that in which fever and diseases are apt

[1] See the works of Dr. John Baker and Mr. T. H. Harrisson.

[2] The word *palolo* is probably of Samoan origin. Much misconception exists among white men regarding the appearance of this annelid. A detailed description of its various appearances and of its influence on the native calendar will be given in a future volume on Atchin.

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136 have any fear of beasts. For, with the exception of man himself, the dog and pig which he has brought, the rat which came in his rafts or canoes, and the fruit bats that may have arrived nestling among his provisions, no mammals of any kind have reached these islands from the land-masses where they evolved. Thus, the native lives free from the fear of animals, or of anything worse than the climate, the mosquitoes, the hurricanes which sometimes spoil his crops or wreck his canoes; and the only living things he is ever called on to defend himself against are other men, as will be seen in the chapter on Warfare. Even the snakes are harmless—although the fear of them is great, owing largely to psychological causes taken advantage of by certain magicians said to have power to change themselves into these creatures, and possibly partly also to a racial memory of continental origin where snakes are physically harmful.

DISTRICTS OF MALEKULA

101 The origin of the name Malekula is obscure. Though now used by
619 those of the younger natives who have been on plantations and speak pidgin-English, there is no known native dialect to which it belongs. Dr. Ivens suggests that the first half of the word, which corresponds with that of Malaita in the Solomon Islands, means simply "people," and points out that in both islands overt descent is patrilineal, while their neighbours are for the most part matrilineal.[1] However this may be, no natives of any part of Malekula today possess any name for the whole island. This may be due partly to the restricted nature of their geographical knowledge,[2] but may also be attributed to the complete lack of any cohesion, either political or linguistic, or even racial, of the innumerable small groups that form its scattered population.

● 131 It is not my intention to attempt here any but the briefest survey of the cultures of Malekula, an island with an area of about 780 square miles (that is to say about half the size of Cornwall, which it resembles somewhat in shape), where, apart from other cultural differ-
[197] ences, the languages are so numerous that each group of villages speaks a distinct dialect of its own sufficiently different from that of its neighbours that a journey of three miles often takes one into an entirely distinct linguistic area. So unknown are most parts of Malekula still today, and so intricate the mountain ranges that intersect it, that few parts of the interior have even been visited by a white man, and almost the whole of our very limited knowledge of it is confined to a few of the coastal districts.

[1] Ivens, 5, p. 20.

[2] This statement may seem strange in view of the existence of sea-going canoes. It is a fact, however, that in spite of their voyages to other islands over what I have termed the inland sea, not even traditions exist of any Small Island canoe having ever sailed round Malekula.

3: Harrisson N-5 (1934-1935) 1936
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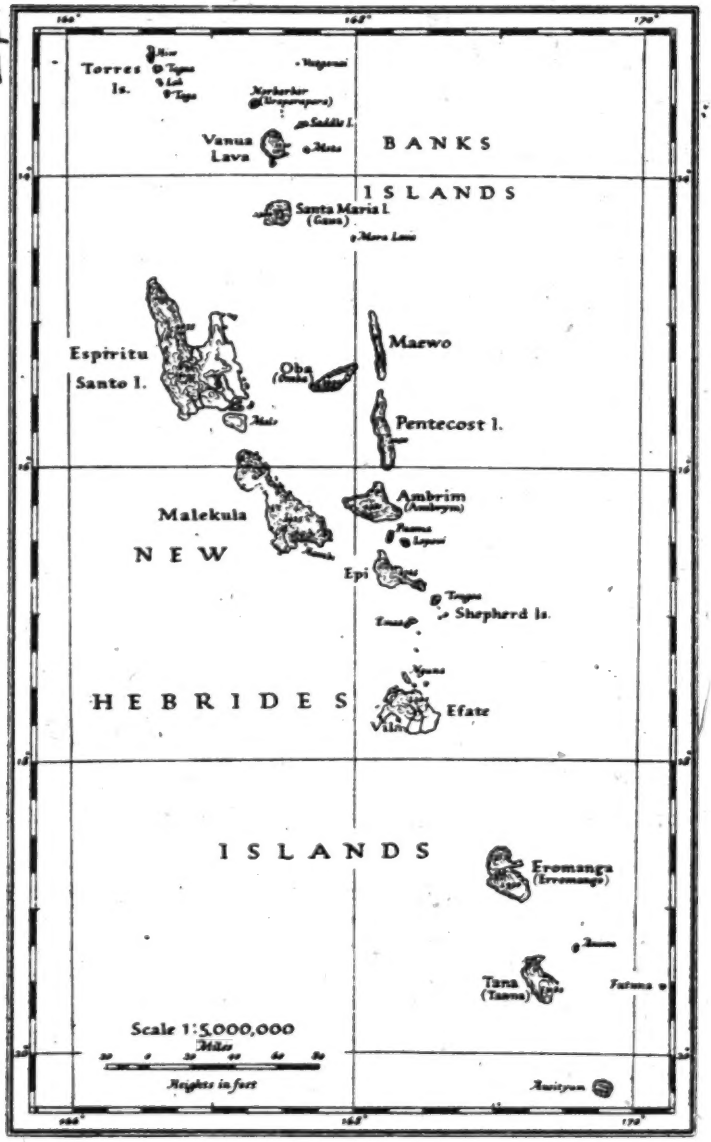

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